THE HAUNTED

Illustrations by
Grant T. Reynard

By MEREDITH

"WELL, you've got me into a pretty scrape!" exclaimed Governor Baldridge as Webster G. Burgess entered his office. "That man Forbes has refused his parole. What do you think of that? I don't want to rub it in, but your efforts in behalf of the under dog are sometimes a little too quixotic."

"I've been out of town for a week and didn't know the matter had been passed on," remarked Burgess easily. "Far be it from me to criticize your admirable administration, but usually your Pardon Board doesn't act so quickly."

"Thank you, Mr. Burgess," replied Baldridge mockingly.

The Governor and the president of the White River National Bank were intimate friends and enjoyed chaffing each other. Baldridge's political rows always amused Burgess, who disliked politics; while the Governor was immensely diverted by the banker's weakness for getting into trouble. As a member of the National Prisoners' Reform Association, Burgess had become deeply interested in the men of the underworld. He not only found positions for the repentant when they left prison; he had, as his intimate friends knew, assisted a number of unregenerates to slip past the police after they had lapsed into sin.

Burgess had made his bank the largest in the State and conducted it along safe, conservative lines while at the same time he maintained a fancy stock-farm and bred and raced horses, and in the indulgence of these tastes lost no money. He was a good fellow and enjoyed doing nice things for great numbers of people who had no claim whatever upon his benevolence. If he amused himself by sheltering criminals either from philanthropic motives or from his secret joy in baffling the police, this was hardly to be counted against him when he was otherwise an exemplary, law-abiding citizen.

From time to time, after he had been in mischief, he asked a dozen of his cronies to dinner at the University Club and there told of his latest exploit. His friends warned him that it was only a matter of time until he would land in jail. But Burgess liked excitement and occasionally the object of his benevolence was worth saving.

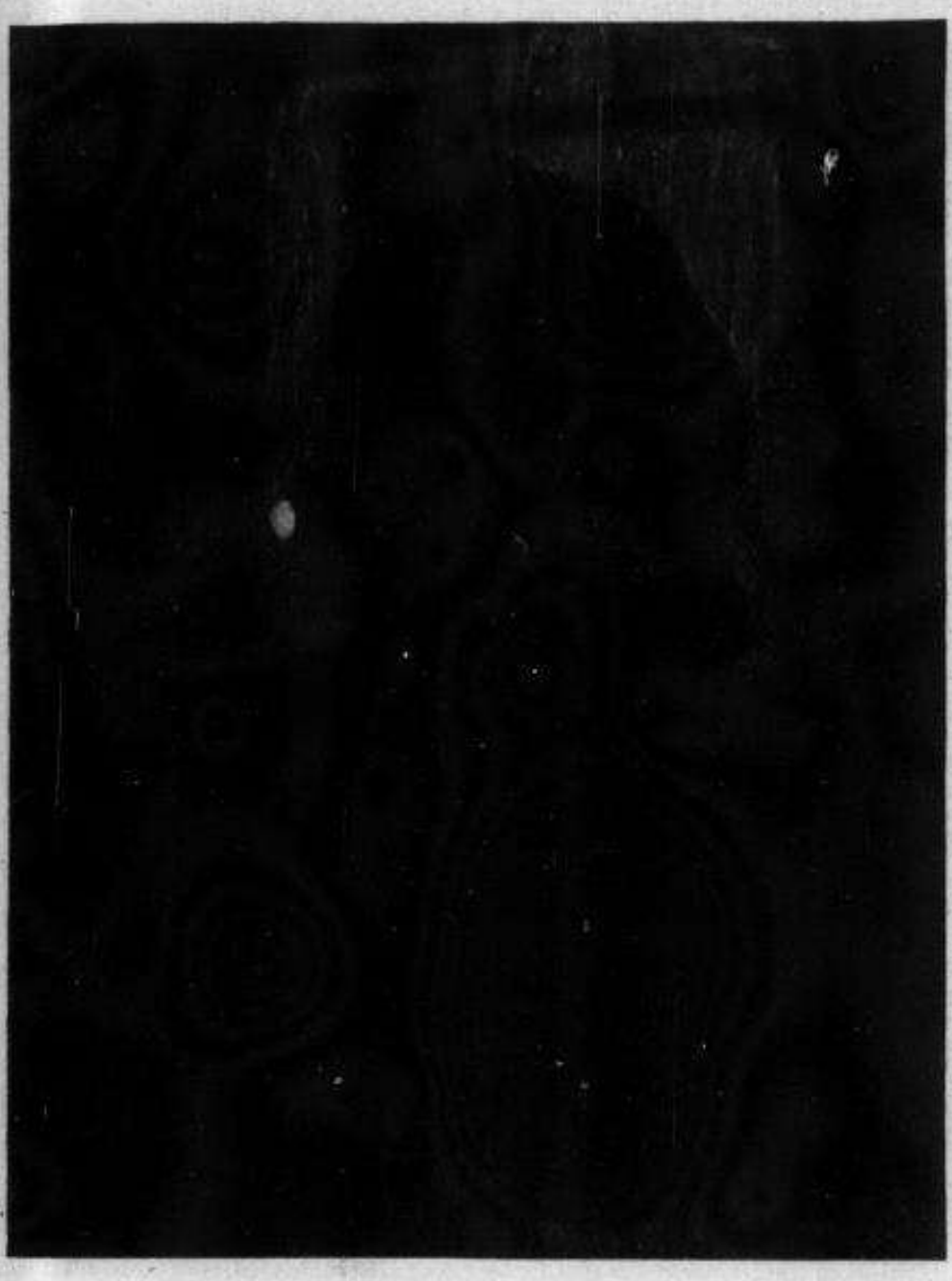
Governor Baldridge thought he had put Burgess in a hole and, having heard the banker relate many stories of his escapades, he was enormously pleased.

"When a man declines a pardon, what's the answer? If the parole has been granted I suppose the warden will have to chuck him out anyhow," said Burgess, sniffing a cigar the Governor offered, dropping it back into the box and lighting a cigaret.

"That's not a campaign cigar," remarked the Governor dryly. "Let's proceed to business. Leonard Forbes was convicted of second degree murder on circumstantial evidence, but, Thoreau remarked, circumstantial evidence is sometimes pretty convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk. Forbes represented some people in New York who had bought coal rights in a lot of land down in Ranger County, and he was an engineer sent out with full authority to develop it. He built himself a bungalow close to the office. Carleton, the murdered man, was an old farmer who lived about half a mile from there. He had a granddaughter living with him, a girl named Hope Carleton.

"She had gone into town on the night the murder occurred, and the State produced no witness of the crime. Forbes had had

ROCKING-CHAIR



NICHOLSON

A Story of an Up-to-Date Ghost

some trouble with Carleton about the coal rights on his land, and the girl testified to this and to the fact that Forbes had an appointment with Carleton on the night of the murder. One of the neighbors who had been calling on the old man met Forbes in the lane. There was no question as to Forbes's being in the vicinity. The old man was shot in the back—the assassin firing through a window. The rifle bullet that killed old Carleton was of the same caliber as a gun found in Forbes's office—a repeater, with one shell missing. And as for motive, the evidence was clear that the young engineer and Carleton had quarreled several times over the terms of the lease. Now, my dear Burgess——"

"Oh, dear fudge!" exclaimed Burgess impatiently. "The prosecuting attorney down there is a clever young fellow, and he built up a very plausible case. Forbes was a new man in the neighborhood, and as the law had to be vindicated it wasn't a difficult matter to persuade a jury to find him guilty. What interested me was that Forbes made no defense; he maintained a stubborn silence to the end. He seemed to have no near relatives, but his employers came out from New York and did the best they could for him. That's the story as I understand it. I only read the newspaper head-lines at the time of the murder. A year ago one of the capitalists interested in those coal properties was here on other business and talked to me about the case. He had visited Forbes at the penitentiary and was positive the man was innocent. But that was only his assumption; Forbes wouldn't say a word. This friend asked me to see what I could do toward securing a parole and I had my lawyer get up the papers and I presented the thing to the Pardon Board myself.

"Well, yesterday the prison warden called me on the telephone and said the parole papers had been received all right but that Forbes declined to leave! And that brings us to your question of a moment ago as to what happens in such an unusual situation.

"Such a thing has never happened before in the history of the State. So I'm going to pass the buck—or, to put it a little differently, I'm going to turn Forbes over to you. His parole is in force; he's been discharged from the penitentiary. Perhaps if you study him a little you may be able to get a story that will interest the round table at the club some night."

Burgess drew a small memorandum book from his waistcoat pocket, found a blank page and poised his pencil. The Governor was laughing at him and he resented being laughed at, even by a Governor whom he liked particularly.

"I'll wager you the best colt in my pasture against a barrel of red apples from your much advertised orchard that within three days I can satisfy you that Forbes is innocent. Shall I make a note of it?"

"Certainly!" the Governor assented. "Only you might add that the colt is to be delivered f.o.b. at my farm. I don't want to have to pay the freight on a horse I never saw."

"All agreed," Burgess replied, and thrust the book back into his pocket.

"You'd better keep away from the scene of the murder," said the Governor. "The Ranger County sheriff dropped in here a week ago and after filing a polite protest against turning Forbes loose gave me the startling information that the Carleton house is haunted. The chair in which the old man sat reading when he

was killed rocks whenever anybody looks at it. You might smoke that in your pipe, Mr. Burgess!"

"Thanks ever so much!" replied Burgess. "A haunted rocking-chair is a pretty idea and has at least the merit of novelty. You'd better motor down with me and have a look at it."

"Oh, I'll appoint you my official investigator! I expect you to sit in the chair and then come back and brag about it."

"That place is about twenty miles from High Ridge," said Burgess musingly. "I'm about due to look at my colts and I'll drop in on the ghost. But I suppose I'd better call at the penitentiary first and see Forbes."

"You little know the extent of my malevolence," replied the Governor, laughing. "Forbes is here! I told the warden to bring him up; they're in the next room now. Thought I'd have a talk with him; but he's a stubborn devil. All he will say is that he wants to go back to the pen; that he didn't ask for clemency and he rather intimates that it's impudent of me to turn him out. You couldn't beat that! With your wide experience with criminals maybe you can reconcile him to his liberty. My duty is discharged and the State shifts its responsibility to your shoulders."

Burgess met the challenge in the Governor's eyes with a grin. "I want you to be sure, Baldridge, that there are no soft apples in the bottom of that barrel I'm going to win from you. Go ahead and open the door."

As Mrs. Burgess was away for the summer, Burgess knew of no good reason why he shouldn't take Forbes back home with him; but not liking the clothes the State had given the convict on his discharge, he bought him the best ready-made suit the town afforded and a generous supply of haberdashery.

While these purchases were being made, Forbes maintained his impassive attitude. Burgess chose the garments and Forbes, stolidly assenting, smiled only once—when Burgess debated at length with the clerk as to the merits of neckties.

Burgess installed Forbes in the most comfortable guest-room and told him to ask for anything he wanted. "Rest or roam about as you please. You will find a fair library on the third floor and there are things to smoke all around the house."

At seven, when Burgess sought Forbes in the library, he found him staring fixedly at the wall with an unopened book on his knees. Many of the criminals Burgess had befriended possessed an ironic humor that greatly tickled him, but Forbes was of a different species and showed himself grimly inaccessible to every offer of sympathy. He was a graduate of one of the great technical schools—Burgess had verified this in preparing the appeal to the Pardon Board—and in spite of his unhappy, disheartened air, the man's bearing was that of a gentleman. At the dinner table Burgess talked steadily, exerting himself without success to win his singular guest to a better frame of mind or surprise him into the disclosure of some explanation of his contemptuous rejection of freedom. They had coffee in the living room, and not until then did Forbes volunteer a remark. With a glance of appreciation about the handsome room, he said:

"Please don't think I am ungrateful. There's nothing you can do for me. I want to go back to prison. As things stand I suppose in a way I'm your prisoner." A wan, heart-breaking smile flickered across his face.

"I don't like that last word," said the banker. "It is not true that you are a prisoner. At twenty-eight the world is all before you, and I want to help you. You have a good education and a fine rating in your profession. I want you to know that I'm going to stand by you."

Forbes nodded, and again half-heartedly expressed his gratitude.

"Of course," he volunteered presently, "I mean to return the money you spent on my case. I am not poor; I have enough to live on in comfort—an inheritance from my father."

"Well, we'll let that rest for the present. I want you to stay here as long as you like. My wife's out of town and you won't be embarrassed in any way. The servants know you only as a guest. I'm leaving town for a few days, but there's a car in the garage that's yours to command. I suggest that you keep out in the air a good deal; it will help to set you up."

"Thank you," Forbes replied listlessly; then added a little petulantly: "I want to go back; I didn't seek my freedom. The friend who interested himself in my case acted without any authority from me. It was fine of you to help, but I don't want my liberty."

The wall behind which he hid himself was as blank as oblivion, but Burgess's active mind was already busy with speculations. Guilty or not guilty, it was inconceivable that Forbes would not in time shake off his apathy. Burgess, studying him carefully, marveled that a man who outwardly gave the impression of a healthy, wholesome nature could be dominated by so morbid a strain.

Now that Forbes was on his hands, Burgess was afraid to touch upon the murder at all, fearing to drive the man closer in upon himself. One question he meant to put to him, but he hesitated and was surprised at his own reluctance to risk it. Finally, as he was piloting him about the room pointing out some pictures that he particularly prized, he turned toward Forbes carelessly.

"You are not guilty; that's the truth, isn't it?" Burgess asked quickly.

Forbes stared at him oddly; a puzzled look came into his eyes as though he hadn't heard the question or possibly hadn't caught its import. Without uttering a word or betraying the slightest emotion, he walked the length of the room and sat down.

The next morning Burgess left town in a racing machine driven by Jimmie Salder, an ex-convict who was, the banker declared, the most satisfactory chauffeur he had ever employed. He quit the car at High Ridge, sending Salder on to Ortonville, the seat of Ranger County where Forbes had been tried, and Gouldville, the mining village, with instructions to make inquiries and pick up gossip relating to the crime. Salder was an attractive, well educated young fellow who had been a clever check raiser and hotel thief until Burgess picked him up. He possessed a highly developed talent for acquiring information and was shrewd and discreet. The banker had no more devoted admirer than Salder, who had been the companion of many of his adventures.

Shortly after midnight Salder was back at High Ridge, where he found Burgess waiting up for him in the big, comfortable farm-house. "There wouldn't be anything to it," said Salder, "except for the ghost."

"Ah! The ghost isn't just a neighborhood superstition? Tell me all you know."

"Well, the loafers I talked to in the Ortonville garage swallow it whole. After the murder the Carleton house was shut up and nobody has lived there since, but people still go out of their way to look at the ghost, and you can hear all kinds of stories."

"All rot, of course! I suppose the wind blows through a chink in the window and wobbles the chair a little."

"Well, sir, it isn't just that way," said Salder. "I came by to have a look. I got there about nine o'clock. It's a clear night and hardly a breeze stirring. I left the machine a quarter of a mile from the gate and went up to the house as quietly as possible. The moonlight is so bright you can see a long way, and as I kept a sharp watch nobody could have beat me to the house to work the ghost trick. I can tell you it's mighty lonesome around there, and the moonlight seemed to make it a lot lonesomer.

"All the windows are boarded up except one on the porch, where a whole sash is smashed out. The moon was over my shoulder and lighted up the whole room, and sure enough there was the rocking-chair, and the darn thing *rocked!* At first it was just a slow, tired sort of rock, not getting much faster but keeping steady on the job. It seemed almost as though the thing was guying me; that's just the way it acted. I walked round the house, tried the doors and looked to see whether the boards at the other windows were loose, but everything was all tight, and then I went back on the porch and took another peep. I hadn't been gone more than two or three minutes and the rocker was almost still, but right away it started up as though it was tickled to see me back!

"There's another story I heard at Ortonville; the old man was supposed to keep a lot of money somewhere on the place. He was one of those rubes that won't trust the banks, and the administrator has never found it. The only heir seems to be the granddaughter who lived with the old man—Hope Carleton. She was in town spending the night when he was killed and hasn't been back to the farm since the funeral."

"How about the girl? Never suspected, was she?"

"No; and she stands high in Ortonville. Everybody speaks well of her and pitied her for having to live with the old man. They all expected that she would get his money when he died, but the land is poor stuff and hasn't been sold and the murder and the ghost put a blink on it."

"Robbery wasn't in the case against Forbes at all. What would you think of seeing the girl in the hope of getting something out of her?"

"Just offhand I'd be against it," Salder answered. "I had a look at her in Ortonville, where she teaches school. She's

mighty handsome, if you ask me—proud and carries her head high. She used to be the jolliest girl in the county and everyone admired her for sticking to her grandfather. They say she hasn't been the same since the murder. When her parents died she went to keep house for Carleton, and the story is that the old man didn't treat her any too well. She was engaged to be married to a young fellow in Ortonville named Cummings but seems to have broken it off. Cummings is an electrical engineer, an Ortonville boy, and he left only a few days ago to take a job in Chicago."

"Rather interesting, that," said Burgess, lifting his head quickly. "Go on."

"Oh, you can't blame the shooting on Cummings! I asked some of the people I talked to in Ortonville about him and it seems the grand jury didn't overlook him, as he'd been at the Carleton place a good deal. You see, Cummings and this girl Hope sang in the Central Church choir at Ortonville and they were both at the church practising the night Carleton was killed. Cummings lived with his mother right there in town and he had been doing some electrical work out at the mines under Forbes, but he was in town for supper that night and took the girl to choir practise. He left her at the house of some friends of hers, where she spent the night, and went home to his mother's.

"The doctors judged from the condition of Carleton's body that he was shot early in the evening. A neighbor stopped at the farmhouse about nine the next morning and found the old man crumpled up in the chair, with the newspaper he had been reading lying on his knees. He never knew what hit him. The shade had been down when the shot was fired, but the old man always sat by a table in the middle of the room in the same place every

night and the shot must have been fired by someone who knew his habits and knew just how to pot him."

"I hadn't got this girl business before," said Burgess, "but of course Forbes knew her, as the Carleton land was under lease, and he had every excuse for visiting there."

"Oh, they were acquainted! That was brought out at the trial, too. Forbes used to call there and he had occasionally taken her for a drive, and he was welcome at the house until the dispute arose about the lease. There was a question as to where a switch should be run onto the land or something like that. From all accounts Carleton had a mean temper and was hard to get on with. People say he didn't appreciate at all the sacrifices his granddaughter was making to keep him comfortable in his old age."

"A disagreement about a switch is a very weak motive," remarked Burgess pensively. "You have got to consider that Forbes is a man of education and had been connected with coal mining in different parts of the country ever since he left college. He's not the sort of fellow who would assassinate an old man in the interest of his corporation. What he would naturally do would be to turn the whole matter over to the company's lawyer. Forbes is a high-strung, sensitive fellow, and probably with an exaggerated sense of honor.

"I'm disposed to think the girl holds the key to the mystery. Let's consider a little. She and Cummings had probably grown up together and possibly she had promised to marry him; and then along came Forbes, an attractive young man from a larger world, and they became interested in each other, and of course the young fellow who had been her lover from school days resented it, and it's possible—of course it's only possible—that Cummings did the shooting."

"Then why didn't Forbes defend himself?" demanded Salder. "I've been in jail a good many times myself and I can't imagine any man just taking what the law hands him without putting up a fight. It ain't in human nature."

"We won't generalize too much about human nature," said Burgess. "We are dealing with an unusual case. I think Forbes is innocent, and yet his conduct certainly points to guilt. We have got to find a motive for his silence. He may think the girl shot the old man, or that she put Cummings up to it. Or he may be so deeply in love with this girl that he would ruin his life to protect his successful rival."

"This chivalry stuff is all right," said Salder with a grin, "but twenty years in the pen isn't a pretty thought. And you've got to remember that Cummings and the girl were both accounted for on the night of the shooting."

"We'll pass that for the moment. As Cummings worked for Forbes there might have been some trouble, but you'd have hard work to connect that with Carleton's death. You say this money that was supposed to be hidden on the Carleton place hasn't been found?"

"No; the administrator has given it up. The girl may know where the money is, and she may have got it or allowed Cummings to get it, but——"

"It's now a quarter of one," Burgess interrupted, "and I'm going to have a look at that ghost before daylight. Be sure you have plenty of gas, get an oil lantern and an electric flash or two, and you'd better take an ax and a hatchet along. I'll be ready in ten minutes."

The Carleton house stood on a low hill behind a semicircle of pines. Leaving their machine out of sight on a side road, Burgess and Salder followed a path that led through a strip of heavy timber and surveyed the premises from the shelter of a ramshackle barn. The moon still lighted the landscape and objects were clearly discernible over a wide area. Salder led the way round the house to the side porch and the two were soon standing by the open window, peering into the room where the tragedy had occurred.

"There it goes," Salder whispered.

The moonlight fell upon the chair, which had already begun to rock, slowly at first and then more rapidly until its movement gave the impression of mockery, a weird, unearthly gaiety, of which Salder had spoken. Burgess watched it silently for several minutes, then took the flashlight and crawled into the room. He scratched with the end of his lamp on the oval rug of woven rags to see whether the dust was thick enough to show footprints. To all appearances no one had crossed the room in many weeks. A ghost could not have chosen a safer place for its habitat.

Burgess stood some distance from the chair, watching it intently, then he caught hold of the back and steadied it. The moment it was freed the rocking began again. He repeated this experiment several times with the same result. In the desolate house on the hilltop the manifestation was uncanny and well calculated to waken fear in the heart of the beholder.

Salder, observing these experiments from the window, laughed aloud when the banker backed into the table, causing it to creak dismally, and gained the window in a single leap.

"If you think I'm scared you're mistaken," Burgess remarked, wiping the perspiration from his face. He knelt and rested his hand on the rug close to the rocker and found that the floor immediately beneath moved in rhythm with the chair. He jumped up and snatched the chair away from the table. In the new position it did not rock, and he made further tests in different parts of the room with the same result.

"Stand still just where you are, Salder. I'll put the thing back where we found it." Its former position was defined by the marks in the dust, and setting it down carefully in the tracks Burgess drew away. Instantly it began to rock as before.

"All right! Now step off the porch for a minute."

As Salder's head disappeared from the window the chair, which had reached the maximum agitation, gradually grew quiet and then stood perfectly still. Burgess cried out jubilantly.

"Come in, Salder, and bring the tools!"

He flung back the rug and kneeling by the table where the chair had stood beat upon the planks with his knuckles. To outward appearances there was nothing to indicate (*Continued on page 142*)

The Ten Books Receiving the Highest Vote

Votes	
563	THE OUTLINE OF HISTORY *By H. G. Wells*
471	FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE *By V. Blasco Ibáñez*
355	IF WINTER COMES *By A. S. M. Hutchinson*
346	AMERICANIZATION OF EDWARD BOK *By Edward Bok*
345	THE LIFE OF CHRIST *By Giovanni Papini*
302	THE CRISIS *By Winston Churchill*
286	SHORT STORIES *By O. Henry*
281	THE VIRGINIAN *By Owen Wister*
256	LIFE AND LETTERS OF WALTER H. PAGE *By Burton J. Hendrick*
254	THE MIND IN THE MAKING *By James Harvey Robinson*

THIS is the result of the vote taken by the International Book Review to determine the ten books which the readers of that publication consider the best ten published since 1900. It seems perfectly logical to me that Owen Wister's "The Virginian" should be one of the four novels included.

But it is a shock to my feelings when I realize that "The Virginian" was published in 1902. Why, that's an age ago—that's back in the days when we thought Langley was a fool for trying to fly an airplane, back when the submarine, the wireless, the radio were absurdities.

I find that I'm beginning to say those were the good old days. Perhaps it's because of books like "The Virginian." Perhaps it's because I remember so vividly the story of the frog farm; because, even today, I thrill so when I think of the hero's "Smile when you call me that name." What a novel that was! As I wrote Mr. Wister—good heavens! that letter is fifteen years old—the man who could write that story, *owed* it to readers to write more.

But it wasn't till a few months ago that he did. It wasn't till a few months ago that he went back to the mine of humor and adventure and romance that produced a novel which has lived for twenty-two years. When he went back he mined a new vein, but with the old Simon pure ore.

Read Mr. Wister's "Sun Road" in the July Cosmopolitan. If you are of my generation, you will meet an old friend. If you're too young to have known "The Virginian," you'll meet—and enjoy—a new one.

[R. L.]

The Haunted Rocking-Chair

(*Continued from page 80*)

that they had been touched since the house was built, and all the planks bore the same discoloration of age. With sharp blows of the hatchet Burgess splintered one after another.

"It's an oblong trap set in the floor," he laughed, poising the hatchet for another blow. "The old boards were shaved down thin on the under side to make them lighter so the machine would work easier. Here are the wires that work the thing, and there's probably a battery somewhere in the cellar, and of course the trigger that set it going is under the porch flooring. It's a smooth trick and you've got to hand it to the chap who thought it up. Standing close by the chair I could hear only a slight click when you stepped on the plank that turned on the power. You said Cummings was an electrician?" he asked, peering into the hole. "Notice how neatly these planks were adjusted so they could move up and down without getting out of place. He even calculated the resistance of the rug. Operating a ghost by electricity is certainly going some."

"But you will never pin it on Cummings, I tell you!" Salder protested. "It was absolutely proved by a dozen witnesses that he was in church the night of the murder and he accounted for himself clear up to midnight, when he went home to his mother's house. This ghost business is a joke rigged up by someone who had nothing to do with the murder."

"I don't doubt the first of that," Burgess replied. "The second point must wait a little. Let us smash these other windows and let in the air."

He kicked the rocker into a corner and they went through the rooms, throwing up the sashes where the glass was intact and tearing off the boards that protected them on the outside. They found the upper floor in great disorder. A room that had evidently been the granddaughter's interested Burgess. The drawers of an old-fashioned bureau stood open, pointing to the young woman's hasty departure.

"We've got to figure out just how a man can sit up and sing hymns in a church fifteen miles from a place where he is committing a murder," said Burgess as they stood on the back porch. "I want you to walk straight out to the barn from this window and when you get there flash the light a couple of times."

The roof of the long, rambling barn made a ragged line against the stars. In order to accommodate it to the configuration of the land it had been built directly back of the house and a little beneath the crown of the hill.

"You think he was shot from the barn?" asked Salder. "Even at that the murderer's hardly been hiding there two years."

"I'm guessing the ghost was a secondary consideration," said Burgess, "and the rocking-chair trick lends color to the idea that the assassin really believed there was money on the place. As I understand it, the ghost didn't begin to rock the chair for some time after Carleton's death. And we may assume that the murderer was afraid to do any searching at once and then, to keep people off the premises, he got the story going that the house was haunted."

Burgess remained on the porch until the flash of the lamp gave him the direction he wanted; then he joined Salder in the barnyard. Mystified by these further investigations, Salder followed Burgess up a rickety ladder into the loft.

"I just want to study that old ruin a little more," said Burgess, loosening the hasp that held a wooden shutter on the side of the loft toward the house. He had left the oil lantern on the sill of the porch window through which they had entered the house. He crawled along close to the floor, throwing back the hay while Salder held the electric lamp.

"About here we should find something," said Burgess, running his hand over the wall. His touch detected something that at once focused his attention, and he snatched the lamp and played it upon a hole only a few inches from the floor.

"Just about the right size to admit the end of a rifle barrel. Looks as though it had been a knot-hole in the edge of the plank, and it was trimmed out a little with a knife; you can see where it was cut. The same hand that fixed the rocker rigged up a machine to fire the rifle. You've got to hand it to the fellow for having studied the old man's habits so well that he knew he was usually sitting in the rocker by the table reading for an hour or so before he turned in. The smartest thing the assassin did was not to skip; there was the girl to hold him and the hope of finding the money. I tell you Cummings is guilty, and a clever scoundrel he is! If he had run away right after the murder, suspicion would have been aroused, but after two years, with an innocent man convicted of the crime, his mind's on the money."

"Well, he must have done some tall hustling that night after taking the girl to the place she was visiting, for he had to come here and see what had happened and then go back to the mine office and put the rifle away in the closet where Forbes kept it. Don't forget that Forbes might have worked the gun from the hole as easily as Cummings."

"That's true," said Burgess. "But the thing that counted so heavily against him in the trial is really in his favor when you come to think of it. He wouldn't have been fool enough to show himself in the lane on the way to the house after setting his trap. Look at this!"

He pointed to several dark spots on the flooring, which they decided were made by drippings of the acid used to charge the battery that had fired the rifle. When they shook up the dusty hay a coil of copper wire rewarded their search. With this encouragement they began seeking for some conclusive proof that the shot that killed Carleton had been fired from the barn loft. It was Burgess who, thrusting his hand under the corn-crib, drew out an alarm clock with its back ripped off. The wires dangling from it matched the coil they had found in the loft, and Burgess expressed himself as satisfied that he had enough evidence to substantiate his theory. The jars of a battery rewarded Salder's further explorations under a loose plank in one of the stalls.

It was now half-past two. Burgess announced that he would go back to the house and take a look at the cellar before leaving.

"Cummings has left Ortonville because he's abandoned the idea of finding the money. Or he may have found it and is merely waiting until he can skip without arousing suspicion. I'm disposed to think the girl knew more about the whole business than she told."

Salder had been studying the alarm clock with interest and he now called attention to the fact that it had stopped at eight-thirty.

"The neighbor who saw Forbes going toward the house fixed the time at eight o'clock. Maybe Forbes was sitting there talking to the old man when the clock pulled the trigger."

"That's very plausible!" Burgess exclaimed. "And like a fool he beat it back home instead of notifying the authorities. Probably when Forbes saw Carleton die there in the rocker his first thought was of the girl. It was a hideous situation—the old man dying there right under his eyes—and it may have flashed through his mind that the girl was guilty. If he was in love with her, his first thought naturally would be to protect her. At any rate he kept his mouth shut until it was too late. There's an old basket we can put this stuff in, and we must hurry along."

Burgess became jubilant when, descending through the kitchen into the cellar, they found that the brick floor had been pried up and the shelving torn from the wall. The clayey earth that clung to the spade that had been used in the excavations was still moist. They went over every foot of wall and floor and were deepening a hole that had been made at the base of the chimney when a sound above arrested them. Salder instantly blew out the lantern and they stood perfectly quiet, listening for a repetition of the noise. In the deep silence they caught the sound of light, furtive steps moving through the upper rooms.

"He wasn't satisfied with his job and has come back. We've got to nail him!" whispered Burgess in Salder's ear.

They felt their way along the cellar wall to an oblong window and crawled into the yard. Huddled close to one of the sitting room windows, they plainly heard steps somewhere in the house. They were still trying to account for the presence of a third person on the premises when someone passed in the walk behind them—a tall man with his hat pulled low on his head, running on tiptoe.

"Follow him and do nothing till I signal," whispered Burgess, settling himself by the window.

It was a curious circumstance that two years after the murder the lonely house should be visited in the early hours of the morning by two persons who presumably had arrived separately. What had brought them was an interesting question. As Burgess debated the matter, a match struck in the farthest corner of the room riveted his attention.

It seemed a very long time until the flame shed sufficient light to disclose the holder of the match, and in his impatience Burgess thrust his shoulders through the opening. He was prepared to find that the visitor was a tramp exploring the abandoned house, and it was with difficulty that he checked an exclamation when a woman's face was slowly outlined in the patch of light. She held the match high, gazing with bewilderment at the hole in the floor and the mechanism that had operated the rocker.

Her fair hair had slipped from under her tam-o'-shanter and its disorder and the bright color of her cheeks indicated that a long run had preceded her arrival. She lighted a second match and walked slowly across the room. The glow of the match revealed a face singularly pure and delicate of outline, but with a sorrow stamped upon it that was perceptible even in the light of the wavering flame.

Burgess was pondering what to do when a slight noise at the porch window opposite evoked from the girl a quickly smothered cry of fear, and the match slipped from her fingers.

"Hope!" cried a man's voice exultingly.

He was already in the room, holding the light of an electric lamp upon her. A scream cut the silence and echoed eerily through the house.

"I thought you'd gone—I thought you'd gone away!" she moaned.

"You thought I'd gone and you came to get the money!" he replied angrily. "You lied to me; you told me you didn't know where it was! Quick—I want that money. Then you've got to go away with me!"

"What are you running away from?" she flashed defiantly.

"So that's troubling you, is it?" he asked insolently. "Well, that's my business! I've waited two years for the old man's money."

"I know now that you are guilty," she said slowly. "I don't know how you did it—In some way you fired the shot that night," she went on deliberately, and it seemed to Burgess that her voice penetrated the dark from a great distance. "You were jealous of Leonard Forbes and you let him pay the penalty. But you wanted money more than you wanted me. You are a murderer, Tom Cummings!"

"Yes, I killed him!" he cried. "I killed him for you! You threw me over for Forbes and I've a good mind to kill you for that!"

The light of his lamp pierced the dark again, falling upon her as she cowered before him. He lunged toward her around the table but stumbled over scraps of the electrical device. He paused and played the light over the spot where Burgess had ripped up the flooring.

"What have you done here?" he shouted.

"The ghost—you have ruined the ghost, you—"

"The ghost is not dead!"

The voice came from the stairway—a deep voice booming solemnly through the house. In the tense hush it seemed to Burgess that an icy wind swept the room. The light in Cummings's hand died again. Footsteps sounded uncannily. Burgess, knowing that Salder could not have entered the house and appalled by the inexplicable challenge from the stairway, clung to the window-frame.

As the steps reached the table Cummings shrieked a curse that choked in his throat. Sounds of a struggle in the dark room aroused Burgess to action. "Salder, in we go!" he shouted, and sprang across the sill.

The chauffeur flashed a light as he leaped in from the other side and both men got their bearings from it. A struggle was in progress near the center of the room, and as Salder dashed in the table was overthrown, knocking him to the floor. Before Burgess could reach the combatants a crash announced that they had fallen through the trap into the cellar.

"Make a light, Salder, and get the girl out of the way!" shouted Burgess, groping for the opening.

As he swung himself through the hole a pistol shot boomed dully in the cellar. When he struck the floor a kick in the face from a struggling man gave him pause for an instant.

There was a second shot and a heavy blow was struck. Then, through the silence, a man's voice called calmly: "It's all right now; I've got his gun! We'd better look out for Hope!"

As Salder lowered the lantern through the opening Burgess saw that it was Forbes who spoke. Cummings lay crumpled on the floor, his face covered with blood; Forbes was already springing up the cellar steps. When Burgess reached the sitting room, he found him bending over the girl, chafing her hands, repeating her name over and over again. He waited till she opened her eyes and satisfied them that she had not been harmed, then went to the cellar to assist Salder in securing the prisoner.

"I have only one question to ask," Burgess said. "I want you to tell me why, if you had even the remotest belief in Leonard Forbes's innocence, you didn't try to help him."

"Oh, I was afraid! I've been afraid of Tom Cummings ever since the murder! I could prove nothing; I don't understand even now how he did it."

"Had Forbes any reason to believe you might have had a hand in the murder? Did he keep silent to shield you?" he asked.

"I suppose he did," she answered slowly. "Mr. Forbes had heard my grandfather abuse me when he was at the house."

"Was Forbes in love with you? Had he asked you to marry him?" asked Burgess.

"Yes," she replied slowly but with a proud lifting of the head. "That's why I never told where grandfather hid his money. I waited, hoping that in his greed the murderer would betray himself. I had been engaged to Cummings but broke it off before the murder. But no one knew of that. When I heard that Cummings had gone I came to spend the night with a friend near here so I could see whether he found the hiding-place. It was all so horrible. All this time he has kept watch of me, compelling me to go about with him, threatening me if I tried to find out about the ghost. And I wanted to live—oh, I wanted to live, thinking the day would come when I could give Leonard his freedom!"

"That's enough! We have Cummings's own admission that he is your grandfather's assassin. I have other evidence that supports his confession; I know how it was done!"

Cummings, tightly bound with a clothesline, was brought up from the cellar. In a frenzy of rage he shrieked threats and curses at Forbes and Burgess.

"Gag him, Salder," Burgess ordered, "and bring up the car."

When Cummings's legs had been tied and he had been lashed to the machine, Hope asked Burgess to return to the house with her.

Taking the lantern she walked to a cupboard.

"If there's any money in the house you will find it here," she said. "There's a false partition on the chimney side of the top shelf; if you will push it a little it will slide back into the wall. When I first came here to live grandfather was very sick for a long time and he told me about his hiding-place."

She held the lantern while Burgess slipped his hand into the opening. After drawing out several hundred dollars in small bills he thrust deeper and lifted out bundles of bonds, some of them very old issues, until he had counted twelve thousand dollars in securities.

"I'll turn them over to the administrator," said Burgess. "And now, Miss Carleton, you needn't be afraid any more!"

Forbes accompanied Hope across the fields to her friend's home while Salder and Burgess drove the prisoner to Ortonville.

At seven o'clock Burgess, Salder and Forbes sat down to breakfast at High Ridge, and Forbes explained how he had come to visit the scene of the murder.

"One of the mine boys I liked particularly had written me at the prison about this ghost stunt, but like all the others he was too superstitious to investigate it. I had never suspected Cummings; his alibi bore every test. But the ghost story suggested that someone around here was trying to frighten people away from the house. I meant to go back to the penitentiary and insist upon serving my term, but I got restless after you left and took the machine and came down for a look at the haunted rocker. I reached the farm a short time before you and was in the house while you were tearing up the floor and I crawled into the attic when you came upstairs."

"Cummings showed a diabolical ingenuity in planning the murder," Burgess remarked. "We found everything but the rifle. That, I suppose, he went back for afterwards. I assume it wasn't really your gun he used?"

"No; but the caliber was the same. A few days before the murder I took my gun from the mine office and fired one shot at a buzzard. Cummings was with me and kidded me about my bad marksmanship. He took the rifle back to the office to put it in the place where I always kept it. And they found it there, of course, with the one shell gone."

"You are a chivalrous gentleman," said Burgess, meeting Forbes's steady eyes. "You would have died a prisoner to save the girl you love from any breath of suspicion."

"That's all over now," Forbes replied. "My next business is to pick up the scraps of my life and put them together again."

"That will not be so hard, Forbes, with Hope to help you."

"When I said I'd prove Forbes innocent in three days, I really thought it might take a week," Burgess remarked to Governor Baldridge the next day after he had given an account of his adventures at the Carleton farm.

"What will you do with Forbes now?" asked the Governor.

"Oh, he can loaf around High Ridge till after Cummings's trial, and then I'll give him a proper wedding—to which you are now invited—and send him to run some mines I own in Arizona. You've got to admit that he's a pretty high-grade fellow."

"No doubt he is! What's troubling me right now is that I've lost my wager."

"Oh, but you haven't!" laughed Burgess. "You shall choose any colt you like, and we'll call your barrel of red apples a present. But I shall expect you to give Forbes a handsome wedding gift—the State owes him something, you know!"